

Information on resources to aid in preparation of taking the vow on nonviolence and a copy of the vow—in triplicate form—can be obtained from the National Office. (.50 each)

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A Vow of Nonviolence



*A Journey Toward
Disarming The Heart*

A "vow of nonviolence"

—that's a new idea, isn't it?

It's an application of an old idea. The tradition appears in the Hebrew Scriptures. When the people of Israel needed God's special help, they often took a temporary vow, accompanied by offerings and acts of self-denial. The 65th psalm says, "I will go into your house with . . . offerings. I will pay thee my vows."

Vows are part of the Christian tradition as well - baptismal vows, marriage vows, the vows of religious.

But the vow of nonviolence seems different from these - what is the difference?

This is a private vow, a personal commitment. It would not be regulated by authority or carry any canonical obligation. These private, devotional vows have a solid base in tradition - they have been taken by Christians for centuries.

Nonviolence in all ways is a hard promise to keep - what if I stumble?

The vow is meant to be freeing - not to be a burden of guilt. So we should begin with a thorough consideration of our readiness for the vow, followed by a prayerful preparation. We should realize that the vow implies a process toward a goal, not an overnight attainment of perfection.

Making a promise to exclude all violence from my life must have a powerful effect - what would you expect to come of it?

The vow can be a channel of grace supporting and

strengthening commitment to nonviolence. It may move others to consider more deeply the Gospel teaching on nonviolence.

To have peace within or among nations we must influence public policy. How can a vow help?

A nonviolent life can be representative of another lifestyle marked by the practice of the works of mercy and justice. It can be a way to show that nonviolence is possible, as Dorothy Day, Gandhi and King have proven by their own lives. And their lives have borne fruit.

Is this a permanent commitment?

No. The promise can be made for a specified time, perhaps a year. It may be renewed annually. Some, however, may wish to make a lifetime commitment.

Who can take the vow?

Anyone who has prepared and reflected to know God's call for them:

- in California's Salinas Valley, Bob Mills took his vow after a 19-day fast.
- 15 parishioners in Our Lady of Good Council, Endicott, NY, took the vow at the final session of the diocesan RENEW program.
- a contemplative nun in Missouri took her vow to come closer to the suffering of the world.
- Chuck Kosanke, Redford, MI, took the vow while presiding at his first Mass.

- Richard McSorley, SJ, who has dedicated his life to the Catholic peace movement, took his vow in the chapel of Georgetown where he teaches.

Where should you take the vow?

The place where the promise is made is a matter of choice: in a church, on a wooded hillside, at a military installation. Some have preferred to take the vow in solitude; others in the presence of their communities, parish, family.

- Paul Magno, one of the Plowshares resisters, took the vow with his wife, Marcia Timmel, while in a federal prison.
- Rev. Thomas Suriano took his vow while alone at a retreat house.
- the Pax Christi group in Bonaire, GA, took the vow at a special church ceremony during which participants anointed each other and pledged prayers and support.
- Anne McCarthy took her vow in the desert, a nuclear weapons test site in Nevada.
- in Waterville, ME, 50 Pax Christi members recited vows in an outdoor peace service where Bishop Amedee W. Proulx presided.

When can you take the vow?

Many have chosen to make their promises on special days in the Church year or on days important to the peace movement. Still others have marked days important to them personally.

Suggestions:

January 1 - World Day of Peace

January 20 - Martin Luther King Day

Ash Wednesday

March 24 - anniversary of Oscar Romero

Good Friday

Easter Sunday

August 6 - bombing of Hiroshima

August 9 - anniversary of Franz Jaegerstaetter

October 2 - anniversary of Gandhi

October 4 - feast day of Saint Francis of Assisi

November 11 - feast day of St. Martin of Tours, conscientious objector

November 20 - anniversary of Dorothy Day

December 2 - anniversary of 4 women religious killed in El Salvador

December 28 - feast of Holy Innocents

A Vow of Nonviolence

The nuclear age has brought us to a "new moment"—this is the challenge issued by the US Catholic bishops in their peace pastoral. For the first time in history nations have armed themselves with nuclear weapons that threaten the future of humankind.

This new kind of violence demands that we evaluate war with "an entirely new attitude." Many Christians, having made this evaluation, seek to make a total break with violence.

Pax Christi USA is inviting Christians who have recognized this "new moment" to take a Vow of Nonviolence. Such a gesture signifies an explicit rejection of violence and a turning toward unconditional love.

Is there a special form and procedure for taking the vow?

Pax Christi is suggesting a special wording. But people should feel free to express the vow in their own words. After the vow is taken, a signed copy should be sent to the Pax Christi National Office and a copy should be retained by the vowed person. Some may wish to share a copy with their local bishop.



Vow of Nonviolence

Recognizing the violence in my own heart, yet trusting in the goodness and mercy of God, I vow for one year to practice the nonviolence of Jesus who taught us in the Sermon on the Mount:

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons and daughters of God.... You have learned how it was said, "You must love your neighbor and hate your enemy," but I say to you, "Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you. In this way, you will be daughters and sons of your Creator in heaven."

Before God the Creator and the Sanctifying Spirit, I vow to carry out in my life the love and example of Jesus

- by striving for peace within myself and seeking to be a peacemaker in my daily life;
- by accepting suffering rather than inflicting it;
- by refusing to retaliate in the face of provocation and violence;
- by persevering in nonviolence of tongue and heart;
- by living conscientiously and simply so that I do not deprive others of the means to live;
- by actively resisting evil and working nonviolently to abolish war and the causes of war from my own heart and from the face of the earth. God, I trust in Your sustaining love and believe that just as You gave me the grace and desire to offer this, so You will also bestow abundant grace to fulfill it.